Head Start Healthy Marriage Newsletter

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Greater Springfield Head Start TLC Program

Healthy Relationship Facts:

- Program targets individuals meeting income eligibility with children in the home 0-5 years of age.
- 147 participants have completed the program since March 2008 (45 Teens, 34 Couples, 68 Individuals)
- Demographics of those served include: 30% under age of 25; 50% are Hispanic, 10% are African American, 8% have been married, and 17% are male
- 10 formal community partnerships help enrich the program and expand opportunities for

TLC: Building Healthy Relationships



It has been a little over a year since the Head Start program of Greater Springfield, Massachusetts, announced receipt of a grant known locally as TLC: Building Healthy Relationships. As the second largest Head Start program in Massachusetts, the program serves over 1200 children and their families, covering the communities of Holyoke, Springfield, and Chicopee, in the Western part of Massachusetts.

Lori Chaves, Director of Clinical & Support Services and the Healthy Relationship Program, is excited to inform that "the program sells itself. Our participants tout the benefits of the program to others. In addition, we share the message about the programs through Head Start parent meetings,

- children and families to get the best available support.
- Participants report better communication skills, increased money management skills, and increased problem solving skills.
- An ongoing research project with Springfield College is expected to provide data on the impact of the relationship program on the children of recent participants.

Reasons Couples Give For Cohabiting

Couples report several common reasons for cohabiting:

Economic advantages: "We can save money by sharing

newsletters, monthly activities, parent boards, flyers, and our community partners."

Ms. Chaves, along with Stacy Fitzpatrick and Nicole Blais, serve as staff/facilitators and have employed unique methods to engage their participants. For example, thirty percent of those that attend the sessions are under the age of 25, many of whom are teen mothers. The need to provide services to teen mothers was highlighted further through a recent documentary that featured the high number of teen pregnancies in the Springfield Public School system.

"Many of these young mothers, have gone from living with their parents...to living in shelters or government assisted housing. So, one thing we do in class is play *The Price Is Right game*," comments Ms. Blais, "it helps them understand the cost of many household items and the importance of budgeting for their children's needs." To further supplement this exercise, a local bank presents information on how to manage their finances. Additionally, Pin-The-Tail-On-The-Donkey is played as a way to improve communication skills.

As the Springfield group begins year 2 of a 5 year project, they are meeting all their goals. Ms. Chaves describes the current status of the program, "Our challenge is not attracting higher numbers of participants, but rather it is finding other ways to obtain funding to provide more programs to meet the demand. We have funding for the staff, however, we are reaching out to find ways to fund costs for transportation, child care, food and prizes that we provide during the sessions. It feels great to know that we are making a connection and impacting lives...we want to do all we can to broaden the scope of our work!"

Insights On Cohabiting

living expenses."

<u>Time together:</u> "We are able to spend more time together."

Increased intimacy: "We have more opportunities to share sexual and emotional intimacy without getting married."

Less complicated
dissolution: "If the
relationship doesn't work
out, there is no messy
divorce."

Testing compatibility:

"Living together enables us to better learn about each other's habits and character and see how we operate together day-to-day."

<u>Trial marriage:</u> "We are planning to marry soon."



With the increasing number of years that most young adults are single and the growing social acceptance of cohabitation, it is interesting to explore how Cohabiters" are different from married couples, to look at some of the characteristics of couples that cohabit, and examine if cohabiting contributes to marital failure. Findings presented here are based on a recent New York Times article.

How Do Cohabiters and Married Couples Differ?

There are several characteristics that distinguish cohabiters from married couples:

- Cohabiting couples have lower levels of personal happiness and higher rates of depression than married couples (Waite & Gallagher, 2000)
- · Cohabiters value independence more than married partners and have more individual freedom (Waite & Gallagher, 2000)
- · Cohabiters are less likely to be supportive financially of one another than are married partners (Waite & Gallagher, 2000)
- · Cohabiters have more negative attitudes about marriage than non-cohabiters (Axinn & Barber, 1997).

What Are Some Characteristics of Couples That Cohabit?

- · Couples living together have the lowest level of premarital satisfaction when compared to other living arrangements (Stewart & Olson), 1990; Olson, 2001)
- · Marriages preceded by cohabitation are more likely to end in divorce (Popenoe & Whitehead, 1999)
- · Cohabiters have lower scores than non-cohabiters on religious behaviors, personal faith, church attendance and joint religious activities (Thorton, A., Axinn, W.G. & Hill, D.H., 1992)
- · Married couples that cohabitated prior to marriage

have poorer communication skills in discussing problems than couples that did not cohabit (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2000)

- · Cohabiting couples are less sexually committed or trustworthy (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).
- Cohabiting males are less involved in housework and childrearing (Waite & Gallagher, 2000)
- · Cohabiting increases the risk of couple abuse and, if there are children, child abuse (Thompson, Hanson & McLanahan, 1994).

Does Cohabitation Contribute to Marital Failure?

- · Lack of Commitment to Marriage: Cohabiting couples are much more oriented toward their own personal autonomy and are more willing to terminate the relationship. (National Marriage Project, 2000).
- · Inability to Make A Decision About Marriage: Cohabitation reflects uncertainty. As professor, Pepper Schwartz, explains, "I think there is something in the experience of cohabitation that makes it hard to know when is the time to make a choice, to change one way of living for another, and to say, "yes, this person is the one for me." (Schwarz, 2000)

Is Cohabiting A Good Way to Prepare For Marriage?

Generally not. The social science evidence suggests that living together is not a good way to prepare for marriage or to avoid divorce. In fact, virtually all the major studies have shown a higher divorce rate among couples that cohabited before marriage than those who did not. No positive contribution of cohabitation to a successful marriage has been found to date. It is important to note that cohabiting that is within 3-6 months before marriage is different from cohabiting as an alternative to marriage. If a couple cohabits a few months before the wedding, and if each partner has had no prior cohabitation experience and no children, then the adverse effects are not strongly supported in research (Popenoe & Whitehead, 1999).

For more information

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